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SUBJECT: ALIYU MOHAMMED HOPES TO REPLACE YAR'ADUA ON PDP  
TICKET

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Classified By: Ambassador John Campbell for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (S) Summary: Ambassador met with General Aliyu Mohammed Gusau, the former National Security Advisor (NSA), on January ¶8. Aliyu Mohammed believes that Governor Yar'Adua has failed as a candidate and says that President Obasanjo is trying to find a way to replace him. Aliyu claims that his relationship with the President has recently warmed and he hopes to be named as the PDP candidate in place of Yar'Adua. He recommends a high-level, oral message from the USG to President Obasanjo on democracy and elections, but worries that a written message may be misconstrued. End Summary.

¶2. (S) According to Aliyu Mohammed, President Obasanjo is trying to decide how to replace Governor Yar'Adua as the PDP Presidential candidate. Mohammed believes that Yar'Adua has failed as a candidate because of his poor health, the perception in the North that he is the candidate of Obasanjo and Dangote (which explains why his motorcade was stoned between Kano and Katsina), and because he is unable to connect with the "man on the street." Yar'Adua would not likely receive campaign support from other PDP governors, whom he has ignored in the past, Aliyu continued. Yar'Adua can govern a homogeneous state like Katsina, but not a country as diverse and difficult as Nigeria. The President is especially worried about the weakness of a Yar'Adua ticket in the face of General Buhari's candidacy.

¶3. (S) Mohammed believes that President Obasanjo will anoint him as the PDP candidate in the next week or two. He claims the President called him personally a few days ago to ask him to deliver a lecture on Nigerian national security at a PDP "retreat" on January 9 (septel). Since he left office in June 2006, Aliyu said he had met/talked with the President only twice previously. He took this recent phone call from the President to be "the first step in a reconciliation." Originally, the lecture was to be given by Chief of Defense Staff Martin Agwai. He noted that the PDP party chairman had called him two hours after the President to follow up on the lecture invitation.

¶4. (S) Aliyu Mohammed observed that at the December PDP convention, Yar'Adua was first, second was Christian southerner Chief Rochas Okorocha, and he was the third in the final vote tally. Since it had been determined to zone the presidency to the North, if Yar'Adua is withdrawn, Mohammed

argues he would be the next in line. He claims to enjoy support all over the country, including from adherents of the AC and the ANPP. Aliyu said that in return for the Presidential nod, he would guarantee that a former President Obasanjo and his close associates would always be treated with the respect due to a former chief of state -- in other words, they would be free from prosecution. As President, Aliyu continued, he would be no puppet of Obasanjo. He would choose a Vice President and an oil minister from the South and/or East, establish a Ministry of Delta Development, and, in general, make the oil/gas industry in Nigeria "transparent." To that end, he would bring in outside experts to do a "zero-based audit" of the industry.

15. (S) Mohammed raised the possibility of a high-level U.S. message about the shortcomings of a Yar'Adua candidacy. Ambassador replied that such a message would constitute U.S. interference in Nigerian internal affairs. Aliyu Mohammed then suggested that President Obasanjo would respond well to an oral U.S. message in support of elections and democracy from Secretary Rice, former Secretary Powell, or former Secretary McNamara. He noted that Former Secretary of

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Defense McNamara visited Nigeria last summer and met with President Obasanjo. A message from Secretary Powell should be "general to general," he said. However, Mohammed believes that Obasanjo would use any written communication from President Bush to complain publicly about U.S. interference in Nigerian internal affairs. The only senior African leader that could reach President Obasanjo is President Mandela. However, Mandela is of advanced age and according to Mohammed, "sometimes senile." President Obasanjo would be happy to go to South Africa at Mandela's request, Aliyu speculated. Powell, McNamara or Secretary Rice, if present at a Mandela/Obasanjo meeting, could lend important support.

16. (S) Turning to other aspects of Nigerian politics, Aliyu Mohammed said that the President is now almost entirely

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isolated. Formerly, he had talked to FCT Minister El Rufai and to EFCC Chair Ribadu, but he is alienated from them now because they have made overtures to Buhari. He went on to say that Babangida and Buhari are in the midst of a (highly improbable) reconciliation. He dismissed Vice President Atiku's candidacy because of his various legal battles. With respect to the Delta, Aliyu said that the military is "losing," that it is outgunned by the militias, but he deflected questions about what the military's response will be. He said the military "reads the papers" like everybody else. The DG of the State Security Service also characterizes the Delta as "lost cause," he said.

17. (S) COMMENT: Aliyu Mohammed wants to be President, thinks that Yar'Adua is stumbling, and thinks that this provides him with another opening following his defeat at the December PDP convention. Everything he says must be heard from that perspective. Despite regarding Yar'Adua as a "little brother" with whom he "talks all the time," he believes the governor lacks the ability to govern Nigeria. Mohammed essentially promises that President Obasanjo and his inner circle will be immune from criminal prosecution in his administration and he sees that assurance as a strong inducement for the President to anoint him as successor. Nevertheless, President Obasanjo's reported invitation to Aliyu to make a major speech at the PDP "retreat" could indicate that the President is reaching out to his former NSA, perhaps to open up more options for political maneuver.

18. (S) COMMENT CONTINUED: The real purpose of his call apparently was to request a high-level U.S. message about the inadequacies of a Yar'Adua candidacy. He mentioned a message in support of elections and democracy only when the Ambassador demurred on the first request. Mohammed prefers

an oral message, and his cautionary view about Obasanjo's potential "misuse" of a written message is interesting. While there is the risk, as cited by Aliyu, that a Presidential letter could be misused by Obasanjo, it is small. END COMMENT.  
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